

Reference

WAYLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY
5 CONCORD RD.
WAYLAND, MASS. 01779

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FIRST PUBLIC LIBRARY

Established In Wayland In 1848
Through Gift By Francis Wayland

The Wayland Free Public Library was the pioneer of the free town libraries in Massachusetts. So wrote C. B. Tillinghast, chairman of the Free Public Library Commission of Massachusetts, nearly fifty years ago, and Horace E. Scudder even earlier reported to the Legislature that there seemed "to be no doubt that the public library in Wayland was the first in Massachusetts to be supported by public funds and free to the inhabitants".

This proud distinction of Wayland among all the cities and towns of the Commonwealth has, curiously enough, hardly been alluded to in the best-known histories of the town. Even the delightful monograph on "Old Time Wayland" by the late Alfred Wayland Cutting is silent about it. But without question Wayland opened the trail in the matter of free public libraries, with Concord, Groton and Boston quick to follow — but only after the legislature had passed a law authorizing towns to use the taxpayers' money for such a purpose. Wayland, greatly daring, had anticipated this law by venturing in 1848, over the protest of some timid souls in the community, to lay a tax on the people to maintain a library free to every inhabitant. But the town fathers, fearing that they might be charge with assuming dictatorial powers by such a proceeding, modified the resolution and gave the individual taxpayer the option of paying or not paying the library assessment.

It was in 1835 that East Sudbury — the original settlement out of which Sudbury developed — took the name of Wayland out of compliment to the Rev. Francis Wayland, president of Brown University, and set up house-keeping for himself. Somewhat later Dr. Wayland expressed a wish to do something for the town that had honored him, and after consultation with Wayland's leading citizen, the Hon. Edward Mellen, chief justice of the Massachusetts Court of Common Pleas, he made the town fathers a gift of \$500 towards the establishment of a public library, on condition that the town raise another \$500 to go with it. The gift was accepted at a town meeting held March 6, 1848. It was during the next year that the Rev. John B. Wight, Wayland's minister and also a member of the Legislature, put through a bill enabling towns to raise money for the support of free public libraries out of the general tax levy.

Library

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Article on
Wayland Library
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Something in the air of Wayland inspired movements of this kind or nourished greatness. Judge Mellen, the Rev. Edmund Sears who gave the world two great hymns, the grandparents of the late General Leonard Wood, David and Lydia Maria Child, the Rev. John B. Wight — these are a few of the names associated with the Wayland of a century ago.

The Historical Sources Survey, a White Collar project of the Works Progress Administration, is now engaged in bringing to light unpublished material concerning the early history of Wayland — letters, diaries, account books and the like. The purpose of the project is to catalogue these papers and to make accurate copies of them to insure the preservation of their contents. These copies will be deposited in the Massachusetts State Library and the Library of Congress. One copy will be presented to the owners or custodians of the papers.

The town officers of Wayland have shown great interest in the project and Mr. Arthur Heard Dudley, representing the Selectmen, and Miss Margaret E. Wheeler, librarian of the Wayland Public Library, have been most helpful in placing material at the disposal of the workers on the project. Already some manuscripts have been found which throw fresh light upon Wayland's honored past. It is hoped that others in private hands or in the care of historical and patriotic societies may be discovered and made part of the public record of the town's history.

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